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forces under the control of a more closely integrated US-Vietnamese command. Regional, Popular and Irregular forces totalling about 230,000 men could largely continue to be used for localised mobile security. But the Americans would do well to consider the adoption of small combined action teams of Americans and Vietnamese—already successfully tried by the US Marines. These units of not more than 30 men could be settled in hamlets, giving the Americans the chance of living among the peasants and taking a more direct and individualistic part in winning "hearts and minds" by providing medical aid, elementary teaching and helping the people to better their lives.

By working closely with the peasants in this way the Americans would gain their trust and also provide a firm base for the 400-odd Vietnamese civilian rural pacification teams now working at hamlet level to restore the roots of government control. Essentially the key to winning in South Vietnam is not simply forcing the Vietcong to stop fighting, but to win the confidence and support of the population.

Overall the South Vietnamese ground forces are in a shocking state. Some of their divisions have been rendered ineffective by desertions—currently running at more than 90,000 annually—and poor motivation and leadership. Many of the rank and

file feel that a government which pays them less than £9 a month is not worth fighting for or owing allegiance to. The US government should give top priority to getting their pay raised, improving training and ensuring that promotion is based on ability, not favouritism.

An equally stiff reappraisal of the use of air power is also long overdue. An avalanche of bombs on North Vietnam and north-east Laos has done little to halt the infiltration of men and supplies. North Vietnamese regulars are pouring into the South at a rate of 6,000 a month.

Meanwhile, the bombing within South Vietnam continues to raise more horror and alarm in the United States than the far heavier attacks on the north. The facts are not rosy. In the last three months more than 400 "friendlies"—mostly civilians—have been the victims of misdirected bombings and artillery barrages. Since January 6,000 South Vietnamese have filed compensation claims—ultimately to be paid by the Americans through the Saigon government—for injuries, destroyed property and loss of relatives. President Johnson has ordered steps to be taken to prevent recurrences. But with a further 100,000 lbs of deadly napalm petroleum jelly-bombs on order, it seems inevitable that there will continue to be accidents—always at the cost of "hearts and minds".

THE BEN BARKA AFFAIR

SOMEONE HAD BLUNDERED

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Why was the trial allowed to take place at all?

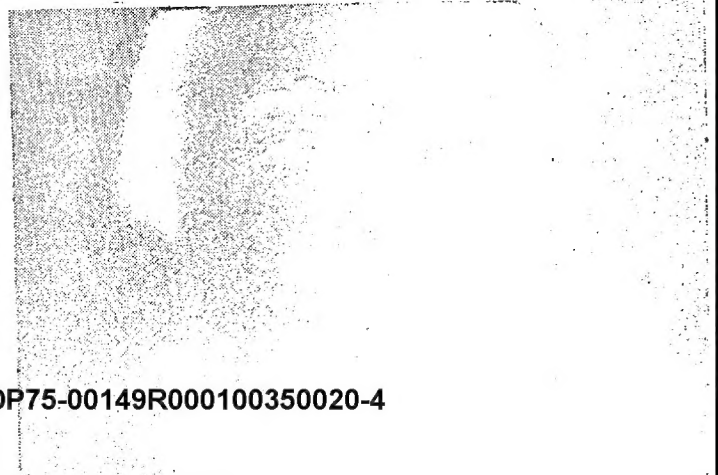
from our own Correspondent

PARIS. One of the most puzzling aspects of the Ben Barka trial, now in its sixth week, and drawing wearily and confusedly to a close, is that the French Government allowed it to take place at all.

If General de Gaulle meant what he said when he gave Ben Barka's widow a solemn undertaking that everything would be done to shed light on the crime and punish the culprits, he has been poorly obeyed. The consecrated formula, "*la question ne sera pas posée*", has been used by the Presiding Judge at the Assize Court, M. Perez, with almost monotonous regularity—even more often, it is suggested, than in that other celebrated political trial at Rennes, in which Captain Dreyfus stood accused of treason.

General de Gaulle may have been genuinely convinced at the start that this was, at least as far as France was concerned, only a "vulgar affair of subalterns"—with the real instigators (fortunately, perhaps) beyond the reach of French justice in Morocco—and that the flood of innuendo and rumour unleashed by the discovery of police complicities in the crime, and exploited by enemies of the regime in France itself, would be stilled by a trial which would reveal its true proportions. Equally he may have been ready to allow the cold light of a public trial to shine upon the affair in the conviction that this position and prestige were above and beyond the reach of scandal, and that all that went on beneath him was

the full results of the police and judicial investigation were available. More probably the Ministers did, either because they knew or suspected what had in fact happened; and succeeded in persuading the general that even if his prestige could take it, his Government's could not. There had to be a trial because public opinion, whipped up by opposition critics, clamoured for it. But this trial had to be kept within bounds, and those bounds must strictly exclude the political ramifications of the affair. Thus the "act of Government", which intervened a week after the disappearance of Ben Barka to suspend the investi-



gation long enough to allow a diplomatic approach to King Hassan in Fez, has remained shrouded in mystery. The diplomats involved in it who were called to the bar succeeded in giving even the senior police officials a lesson in discretion. Was the object, as the French press has repeatedly suggested, to obtain information on the fate of Ben Barka against an undertaking to drop the case against the Minister of the Interior, General Oufkir?

No one has, for one moment, even in poor jest, suggested that General de Gaulle was anxious to get rid of Ben Barka, or was prepared to allow the French authorities to assist the Moroccans in doing so. What the French press has suggested as a far more likely explanation of what really happened is that the French police and counter-espionage organisation were asked by the Moroccans to assist in getting Ben Barka back to Morocco, "if necessary by unorthodox means", as Antoine Lopez, the former Air France official, "honourable correspondent of the French counter-espionage", and friend of General Oufkir, declared in court. If so, the permission can only have been given at a higher, semi-governmental level.

Those who authorised this helping hand, if such it was, by the French police had reckoned without the bitter hatred of General Oufkir against Ben Barka, and his clear determination to prevent a reconciliation between the King and the left-wing leader at all costs. Evidence was produced in court of two plots against Ben Barka's life, one in Morocco, the other in Geneva. He himself was quoted by witnesses of unimpeachable character as living in fear of collusion between the French and Moroccan police against him.

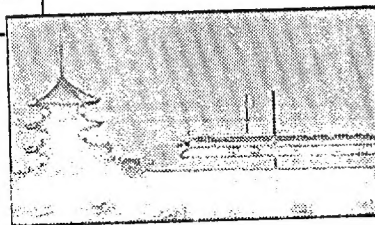
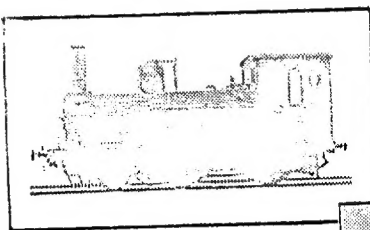
It has also been shown in court that on the very day of his

disappearance, Ben Barka thought the political climate in Morocco was changing. Overtures had been made to him on behalf of the King. Morocco was heading towards a Government of national union, and he was ready to cooperate with the King in forming it. This would help to explain why he made no objection to getting into a police car when bidden by two French police officers at Saint Germain des Prés on October 29, 1965, the more so as he was told he was being taken to a meeting with high Moroccan officials.

The suggestion that the French authorities were prepared to facilitate Ben Barka's return to Morocco was put forward in a letter to the court from one of the French underworld characters used by General Oufkir to do the dirty work, and being tried (along with Oufkir himself *in absentia*). It would explain the authorities' violent reaction when the role of Oufkir in the affair became gradually clear, demonstrating that they had been fooled by the all-powerful Moroccan Minister of the Interior. It also explains General de Gaulle's denunciation of Oufkir, at his Press conference last February, a most unusual procedure with regard to the Minister of a friendly power, well before the trial had begun.

Barring accidents, the trial will not, for good reason, succeed in producing any real evidence of the complicity of the French authorities at a policy making level in the disappearance of Ben Barka. The French counter-espionage organisation has been proven at best inefficient, and at worst hardly choosy in its methods. The police stand convicted of having had close relations with the underworld (not that this was precisely a revelation). The puritanical Fifth Republic turns out to be not entirely free from the corruptibility of its

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predecessors. The men in the dock will, with perhaps one exception, be convicted. But account will have to be taken of the fact that they are merely accessories to the crime.

General Oufkir and his Moroccan acolytes will also, presumably, be sentenced *in absentia*. The question then arises as to what effect this will have on relations between Paris and Rabat, and on the large French colony in Morocco. Unless, of course, Maitre Tixier-Vignancourt, the right wing candidate in the Presidential elections last year, who is defending Lopez, the star defendant, succeeds in pulling off his wager and demonstrating that the Moroccan Minister had really nothing

whatsoever to do with the kidnapping: Tixier-Vignancourt's case will be that Ben Barka, as a Moroccan news agency message last week hinted pointedly, died of an overdose of some soporific while on the very point of returning to Rabat of his own free will.

It would take a Balzac to do justice to the variety of contemporary types who have filed through the courtroom in the course of the trial. Honesty might have been the best policy after all. The French Government could have afforded to come clean. But unfortunately most Governments, and not only the French by any means, prefer, to cover up.

SOVIET UNION

CPYRGHT

THE ASSAULT ON THE LEFT

Mr Kosygin's liberalisation measures, and even Mr Kosygin himself, are under severe threat from Moscow's conservatives.
By David Burg

There are two main trends visible "above ground" in Russia's public life. One school wants to perpetuate a "command society" where all political, economic, social and even to an extent private problems are settled by Party decree. The other would like to introduce a more or less broad measure of spontaneous self-adjustment into human relations. The partisans of the first are known in the Soviet Union itself as the conservatives, or the Right; the defenders of the second as the liberals, or the Left. The conflict between the two is, in broadest terms, the basic conflict in Russia today. The multiplying signs of a successful right-wing offensive have been the most recent development in it.

This time it is not a frontal assault accompanied by vociferous propaganda and denunciations of heretics, as in 1957 or again in 1962-63. From their failures then the conservatives had learned that such tactics mobilised more resistance than they could cope with. Now only seemingly piecemeal measures are taken, and with minimum publicity. But they add up to a slowdown, or a halt, or even a roll-back in liberalisation. Almost imperceptibly, the Soviet political spectre shifts to the right.

The main bone of contention between the liberals and the conservatives is the realisation of Mr Kosygin's economic reform. The liberals expect that, as one of them recently put it, "it will result in changes in all areas of life and in the mentality of our people". The conservatives seem to agree, and they do their darndest to prevent it. Their sabotage of the reform is a well-aided subject in these columns. Admitting it quite bluntly for the first time, *Pravda*, which on the whole supports a somewhat curtailed version of economic innovations, wrote in an editorial exasperation on Sunday before last: "There are comrades who, while recognising the great importance of the economic reform verbally, have so far taken no organisational steps towards its practical implementation". The paper pleaded with these responsible comrades to change their ways, but it was not

But the anti-reform commandos do not limit themselves to deliberate inaction. They also work quite hard to blow up some of the foundation of reform. Since it relies on profit as the main incentive to economic activity, rational prices are essential for a successful operation of the new system. If profits are derived from irrational prices, i.e. not dictated by supply and demand, the development of whole branches of industry may be misdirected and the system will quickly discredit itself.

It has been clear to most serious Soviet economists for some time that the only way to guarantee the rationality of the prices is to make them flexible and responsive to the market, though there has not yet been any agreement about the extent and the means of achieving this. This debate seems to have been superseded by two extremely authorita-

